

# Child employment research findings

Research into child employment was commissioned by Industrial Relations Victoria (IRV). EY Sweeney was engaged to carry out the research project. The objective of the research was to evaluate the extent and experience of children under 15 years old in employment, from the perspective of the employer, the parent and the child. Motivations for the employment and the level of awareness and compliance were also examined. The research findings will assist in the Child Employment Act review.

The research involved a desktop review of previous studies, as well as quantitative and qualitative research.

## Key findings

### How many children under 15 years are working?

- 1 in 10 children are or were employed when under 15 years old
- 6% of children under 15 years are currently employed
- 3.5% of Victorian businesses currently or have previously employed children under 15

### Where are children working?

The largest proportion of children are working in the retail sector (35%). Food services follows, including cafes and restaurants (21%). Next is administration and support service, and then arts and recreation services (this includes entertainment).

### Why do employers employ people under 15?

Employers self-reported that their most common reasons for employing people under 15 were altruistic and included providing children with work experience, or doing a favour to a friend or family member. For employers in entertainment, they needed someone of that specific age.

### Do children work to support family income?

The data would suggest not. Working children proportionately come from families with higher household incomes. In fact, the general pattern indicates that the higher the income, the greater the number of children working.

## Is there a difference in employment of children in metropolitan areas compared with regional Victoria?

There is a higher proportion of children residing in metropolitan Melbourne who are employed compared with regionally based children. However, there are proportionately more regional employers who employ people under 15. Regional employers are more likely to employ just one child, however, whereas the metropolitan employer will employ several.

## Why do children choose to work?

The most common reason given by children was to make their own money. Many children saw the advantage of getting some early work experience so that they had the edge over others once they turned 15, in order to get a better job.

## Some basic facts about child employment

Children work an average of 6.2 hours per week over an average of 2.4 days per week.

Of concern, the research tells us that 52% of employed children are sometimes or always paid cash in hand, and 38% do not receive payslips.

## Things children like about working (positive outcomes):

- having their own money
- gaining experience
- the work
- building social skills
- friends

## Some negative things experienced by children:

In cafes/restaurants 28% of children said they experienced bullying at least sometimes and more generally 24% across all industries said that someone spoke or acted inappropriately toward them.

## Business awareness of child employment regulation

The research reflects that businesses generally believe they know more than they actually do. They believe they are employing children lawfully. However, parents reported that just 10% of employers had sought a permit to employ their child. Awareness was greater in the entertainment industry than any other industry. Overall, businesses don't know what they don't know. They don't think to go and look it up because they are not aware of the need to.